



EMERGING OR EVOLVING DYNAMICS
STATE AND SOCIETAL LEVEL

The Future of Public Activism: Populations Poised To Increase Pressure Worldwide



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Over the next two decades, populations in every region and in every type of political system are likely to demand more from their political and corporate leaders, potentially prompting those leaders to be more responsive and possibly accountable but also risking societal divisions, broader repression, and less coherent policies. During the past decade, public activism—direct public action intended to impart social or political change—has been on the rise in every region, including high-profile protests and demonstrations. The combined increases in prosperity, education, urbanization, and access to communication technologies are equipping people to express their interests and needs and seek more government action. As public activism continues to expand and potentially becomes more sophisticated, governments of all types will seek avenues to respond—either by attempting to appease public demands or by actively suppressing avenues for activism. Over time, this dynamic will offer the prospect for more accountable leadership and improved democratic health, but in the near term, it could increase factionalism and reduce policy coherence and effective strategic planning.

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MASS PUBLIC MORE SKEPTICAL OF INSTITUTIONS—ESPECIALLY GOVERNMENT

Worldwide trust and confidence in public and private institutions and their leaders have been persistently low during the past decade, especially among nonelites. Various polls consistently indicate that approximately half the nonelite public distrusts institutions, including government, business, media, and nongovernmental organizations. Elites are defined as people who are college educated, in the top 25 percent of household income in each market, and exhibit significant media consumption. According to one study of 16 high-income countries over several years, the nonelite respondents claiming trust in government during the period 2012-2020 never exceeded 45 percent. In an online survey of 28 geographically diverse medium- and high-income countries, the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer found that more than half the people surveyed said the “system” was failing them, and only 15 percent indicated it was working for them.

- ***Dissatisfaction With Democracy.*** A 2019 Pew Research Center survey conducted in 34 democratic countries found that a median of 52 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the way democracy was working, and only 44 percent were satisfied. Sixty-four percent of respondents disagreed that elected officials care what people like them think, compared with just 32 percent who agreed. In most countries polled, those who did not believe elected officials care about the opinions of ordinary people were also unhappy with how democracy was performing in their countries.
- ***Trust Gap Widening Between Elites and Mass Public.*** Compared with elites, who tend to have more favorable views of government and markets, the mass public is much more skeptical that government and other institutions are performing effectively. The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer conducted in the United States, Western Europe, Brazil, China, Japan, and South Korea, found that just 52 percent of the mass public surveyed trusted business and only 45 percent

trusted government, compared with 69 percent and 55 percent of elites, respectively. A series of polls by Edelman from 2012 to 2021 revealed that the gap in trust between the elite and everyone else had more than tripled with respect to key institutions, including nongovernmental organizations, business, government, and the media.

Publics in every region have become more concerned about the future and less optimistic, even as their personal incomes have risen. People's average standard of living around the world has steadily improved during the past half century, with global per capita GDP growing in constant dollars from \$3,700 in 1960 to nearly \$11,000 in 2018.

- In some countries, the share of the population expecting their children's future financial situation to be worse than that of their parents has risen sharply—rising 35 percent in Brazil and 25 percent in Tunisia between 2013 and 2018, for example.
- Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pew Research Center found in 2018 that a median of just 34 percent of respondents in 18 countries with advanced economies expected the children of that country to be better off than their parents when they become adults. Among nine emerging economies, the figure was 42 percent.
- The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer found that only small percentages of people in several advanced economies thought they would be better off in five years, including Japan (15 percent), France (19 percent), Germany (23 percent), and the United Kingdom (27 percent).

This distrust in the system and worries for the future reflect growing public concern about corruption, globalization, eroding social values, immigration, and the pace of innovation, according to Edelman Trust Management's analysis of its survey results during the past 20 years.

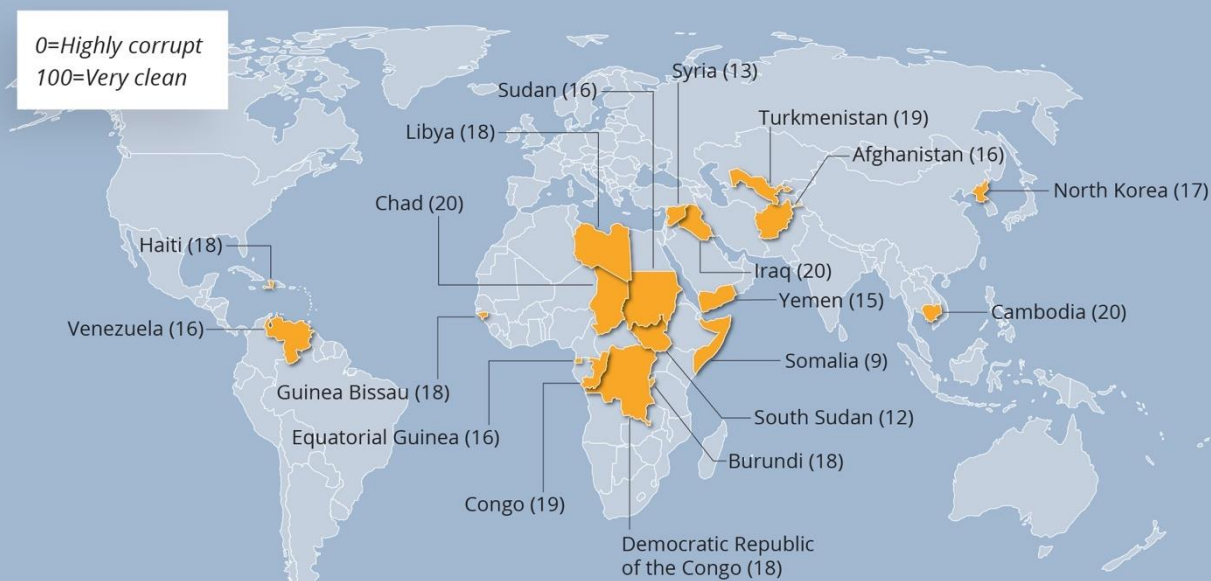
GRAPHIC 1

PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION DRIVING PUBLIC OUTCRY

Trust and confidence in public and private institutions and their leaders have been persistently low over the past decade. Distrust in the system reflects growing public concern about corruption.

Globally, according to a number of international governance experts, perceptions of corruption are now one of the most dominant factors driving political change.

COUNTRIES WITH WORST PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION SCORES



OTHER COUNTRIES WITH CORRUPTION SCORES BELOW 50

Albania.....	35	Dominican Republic.....	28	Laos.....	29	Romania.....	44
Algeria.....	35	Ecuador.....	38	Lebanon.....	28	Russia.....	28
Angola.....	26	Egypt.....	35	Lesotho.....	40	Sao Tome and Principe.....	46
Argentina.....	45	El Salvador.....	34	Liberia.....	28	Senegal.....	45
Armenia.....	42	Eritrea.....	23	Madagascar.....	24	Serbia.....	39
Azerbaijan.....	30	Eswatini.....	34	Malawi.....	31	Sierra Leone.....	33
Bahrain.....	42	Ethiopia.....	37	Maldives.....	29	Solomon Islands.....	42
Bangladesh.....	26	Gabon.....	31	Mali.....	29	South Africa.....	44
Belarus.....	45	Gambia.....	37	Mauritania.....	28	Sri Lanka.....	38
Benin.....	41	Ghana.....	41	Mexico.....	29	Suriname.....	44
Bolivia.....	31	Greece.....	48	Moldova.....	32	Tajikistan.....	25
Bosnia and Herzegovina.....	36	Guatemala.....	26	Mongolia.....	35	Tanzania.....	37
Brazil.....	35	Guinea.....	29	Montenegro.....	45	Thailand.....	36
Bulgaria.....	43	Guyana.....	40	Morocco.....	41	Timor-Leste.....	38
Burkina Faso.....	40	Honduras.....	26	Mozambique.....	26	Togo.....	29
Cameroon.....	25	Hungary.....	44	Myanmar.....	29	Trinidad and Tobago.....	40
Central African Republic.....	25	India.....	41	Nepal.....	34	Tunisia.....	43
China.....	41	Indonesia.....	40	Nicaragua.....	22	Turkey.....	39
Colombia.....	37	Iran.....	26	Niger.....	32	Uganda.....	28
Comoros.....	25	Jamaica.....	43	Nigeria.....	26	Ukraine.....	30
Cote d'Ivoire.....	35	Jordan.....	48	North Macedonia.....	35	Uzbekistan.....	25
Croatia.....	47	Kazakhstan.....	34	Pakistan.....	32	Vanuatu.....	46
Cuba.....	48	Kenya.....	28	Panama.....	36	Vietnam.....	37
Djibouti.....	30	Kosovo.....	36	Papua New Guinea.....	28	Zambia.....	34
		Kuwait.....	40	Paraguay.....	28	Zimbabwe.....	24
		Kyrgyzstan.....	30	Peru.....	36		
				Philippines.....	34		

Source: Transparency International. The Corruption Perceptions Index covers 180 countries and territories and is calculated using 13 different data sources from 12 separate institutions.

Public opinion data indicates that majorities across Sub-Saharan Africa (55 percent), the Middle East and North Africa (65 percent), and Latin America (53 percent) believe that corruption is increasing in their region. According to a 2019 report by Transparency International, two-thirds of countries scored below average in the level of perceived corruption. Countries with the highest levels of public concern about corruption also have the highest levels of political power concentrated among the wealthy elite. Globally, according to a number of international governance experts, perceptions of corruption are now one of the most dominant factors driving political change.

PUBLIC ACTIVISM ON THE RISE THROUGH MULTIPLE CHANNELS

This discontent has led to a surge in public activism in the past decade, in every region and across all types of governments, with varying degrees of impact. As one scholar has noted, “There is not a political model that seems to be doing well or that is inoculated from the kind of uprisings the world is witnessing.” The head of Asia research at risk analysis and strategic forecasting firm Varisk Maplecroft predicted in January 2020, before the widespread impact of COVID-19, that 80 percent of the 125 countries the firm analyzes would experience an upsurge in unrest in the next two years. People have used some very visible tactics, including mass protests and nationwide boycotts, as well as lower profile methods, such as advocacy campaigns, social media operations, and the mobilization of key influencers, to try to exert pressure on their governments, institutions, and the business sector.

SUBNATIONAL RESPONSES TO PUBLIC PRESSURE

Exclusive focus on national-level dynamics underrepresents the impact that the public sometimes is able to have by changing the decision calculus of lower-level political leaders. Subnational elected leaders are more sensitive to strong swings in public sentiment than national-level leaders, given their familiarity with their constituencies.

According to one recent study, subnational policies often shift to reflect public views over time, especially through the gradual calibration of policymakers' decisions to voters' intent, and this influence has increased over the past eight decades.



Mass Protests

In 2019, there was a spike in protests worldwide targeting national-level political leadership, but this rise in public demonstrations is part of a decade-long trend. A study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies found that mass protests increased annually by an average of 11.5 percent between 2009 and 2019, with the rate of growth highest in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2019 alone, antigovernment protests took place in 114 countries and territories, and some of these protests—including marches and large-scale public demonstrations as well as sporadic violence—resulted in notable change, including the removal of political leaders (Algeria, Bolivia, Iraq, and Sudan) or policy adjustments (Chile and Hong Kong). In 2019 in Hong Kong, months of large street protests initially resulted in the withdrawal of legislation that restricted some freedoms for Hong Kong citizens, but in response, Beijing imposed a new national security law in 2020, that targets activities perceived as fostering political independence. In Chile, government leaders adopted changes in response to protesters' demands, and in Ecuador elected leaders granted concessions to protesters participating in mass demonstrations. In contrast, increasing protests across Russia in support of opposition leader Aleksey Navalnyy have been met with arrests and an extended sentence for Navalnyy.

Boycotts, Civil Disobedience, and Other Public Pressure Campaigns

Civil resistance activities—unarmed civilians' use of nonviolent tactics to withhold consent—have grown steadily during the past five decades, putting pressure on government leaders and corporations alike.

- **Targeting Governments.** The 2019-20 transportation strike in France—the longest in the country's history—principally over President Emmanuel Macron's effort to overhaul the country's pension system led to the government's reversal of planned changes to national pension policy.
- **Targeting Corporations.** Both consumers and employees are pressing private corporations and organizations to adjust behaviors and policies to align more closely with their interests, needs, and values. Employees are increasingly engaging in walkouts and boycotts when their companies do not conform to values that they deem important, according to Edelman Trust Management, which has studied trust levels during the past 20 years. In response to growing requests from customers, international corporations, including energy companies and investment firms, are building environmental sustainability into their production and investment decisions. Consumer demands often effect change much faster than government regulations.

Social Media Engagement

During the past two decades, social media engagement and online campaigns have become an increasingly critical component of public activism, spreading information quickly and allowing groups to organize virtually without alerting authorities. At the same time, individuals, groups, and governments have manipulated online content to spread disinformation, undermine groups and causes, and at times, provoke public action and conflict.

- **Connection and Communication.** During the 2011 Arab Awakening, large numbers of people harnessed social media networks to organize participation within countries and generate attention globally. Social media played a significant role in communicating developments to influential people outside and across the region, and increasing the visibility and potency of the movement.
- **Disinformation.** According to a report by Oxford University, disinformation campaigns occurred in 70 countries in 2019, up 250 percent in two years. Disinformation is an efficient tool for individuals and organizations; true stories take about six times longer

than false stories to reach 1,500 people, according to a recent study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. False news stories are about 70 percent more likely to be retweeted than true stories.

- **Divisive Rhetoric.** Governments and affiliated organizations increasingly are using social media to try to shape popular opinion and influence public behavior at home and abroad. The pro-Kremlin Internet Research Agency, for example, conducts operations online, including spreading falsehoods about the coronavirus, to induce distrust in democratic institutions and undermine the European Union. The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar found that some Burmese authorities disseminated hate speech toward the Rohingya population through Facebook and other media platforms in 2017, creating a climate in which extremist views gained traction.

Lower Profile Efforts

In addition to the highly visible protests, pressure campaigns, and social media engagement, groups and individuals have employed behind-the-scenes tools to push for political outcomes, including working with issue-based advocacy organizations or through key policy influencers. Efforts to shape policy outcomes through persuasion of government officials from countries at every stage of development constitute an increasingly lucrative business.

- **Advocacy.** Often led by nongovernmental organizations, advocacy efforts depend heavily on public support and have influenced government policies on issues ranging from arms sales and nuclear nonproliferation to single-country policies and development assistance. Strong public backing can be instrumental in the likelihood of an advocacy campaign's success. One recent study of advocacy success in a sample of European markets found that

the effectiveness of advocacy operations in achieving intended policy outcomes increases proportionately with the strength of public support for that objective. Another study of the relationship between lobbying efforts and government responsiveness across 13 policy areas in Germany found that principle-based "cause groups," strongly backed by public opinion, increased government responsiveness through the provision of campaign contributions, electoral support, and information to governments.

- **Key Influencers.** Outside the governing structure, influencers, such as business elites, leaders of issue-based nonprofit organizations, and prominent social media personalities, also affect policy by facilitating connections between the public and government leaders. By channeling their sentiments through these influencers, groups and private individuals can maximize the chances of substantive policy change.

CHANGING SOCIETAL CONDITIONS PORTEND GREATER PUBLIC ACTION

Changing economic and social conditions are providing populations in every region the resources, time, and tools to channel their needs and interests into action and to engage officials and other elites with greater intensity, frequency, and effectiveness. Populations in the most developed countries are already well positioned to do this, and populations in developing countries are likely to become increasingly equipped to express their interests and needs as material conditions improve.

Increasing Prosperity

Greater prosperity, especially in developing countries, is likely to increase the intensity of future public activism, as people have greater free time, higher expectations, and better access to the tools for participation. The reduction in people's preoccupation with immediate financial concerns facilitates a wider scope of awareness and

ambition beyond immediate needs. Moreover, as people become wealthier in developing countries, they often express rising economic and social expectations in terms of material benefits, such as better healthcare, housing, or education, which governments are often not in a position to provide expeditiously.

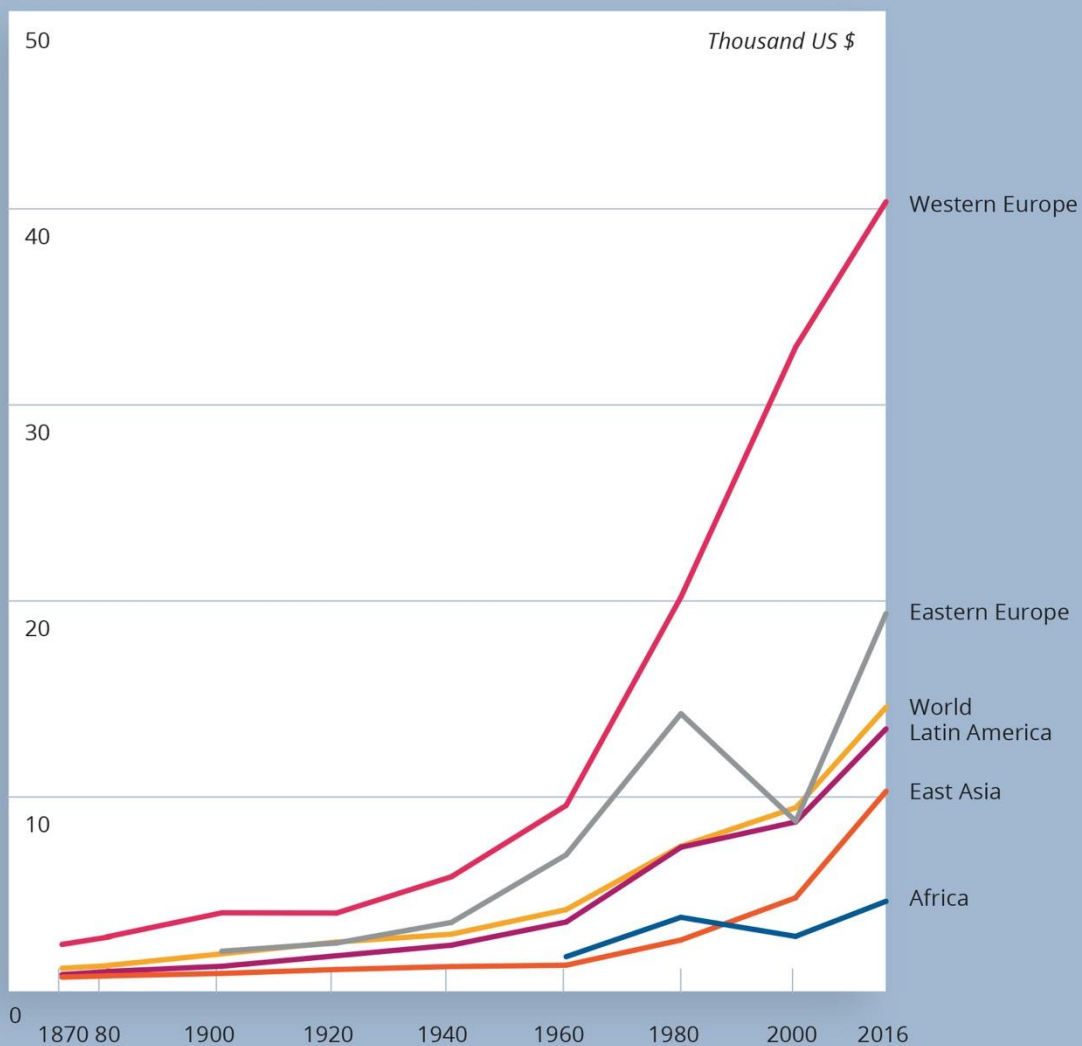
- From 1990 to 2017, the percentage of people living on less than \$1.90 per day dropped from 36 to 9.2 percent of the world's population. These gains were not evenly distributed across all regions; the biggest change occurred in East Asia and the Pacific, whereas the change in Sub-Saharan Africa was smaller. If economic growth patterns were to match historical trends, poverty would fall to about 5 percent by 2030, but disparities are likely to grow. The global pandemic is likely to make poverty reduction more difficult to attain in the next 3 to 5 years, and under most projections, Sub-Saharan Africa is still likely to contain a quarter of the world's population in extreme poverty in 2030.

- In 2018, for the first time in history, more than 50 percent of the world's population reached the middle class, and by 2030, estimates suggest that the middle class could exceed 63 percent. The vast majority of the increase in the middle-class population has come from Asia in the past decade, principally China and India, but Sub-Saharan Africa is poised to make additional gains. Consumer spending in the region, which is driven primarily by the middle class, was an estimated \$1.3 trillion in 2010 and is likely to double by 2030, according to the Africa Development Bank Group (AfDB). The AfDB forecasts that the share of Sub-Saharan Africans qualifying as middle class will grow from today's 13 percent to 42 percent by 2060.
- As a result of these factors, publics in most Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia countries are likely to be more engaged in the next decade. China's middle class has grown rapidly from 3.1 percent of the population in 2000 to 50.8 percent in 2018. As a result, nearly 670 million people have greater resources to make demands on their government.

GRAPHIC 2 GLOBAL PROSPERITY PORTENDS MORE INTENSE PUBLIC VOICE

Greater prosperity tends to increase the intensity and effectiveness of political participation. As people become wealthier, they often express rising economic and social expectations in terms of material benefits, such as better health care, housing, or education, that governments are often not in a position to provide expeditiously.

GLOBAL REAL GDP PER CAPITA, 1870-2016



Source: Maddison Project Database (2018).

Rising Education Levels

In all regions and for both genders, increasing access to education is providing people greater awareness of the domestic and international dynamics shaping their lives as well as an increasing understanding of the levers for change at their disposal. During the past two centuries, the total population of people over age 15 with some formal education has quadrupled, from 20 percent in 1820 to 80 percent today, and by 2050, the proportion of people receiving no formal education is likely to drop to almost zero. East Asia, Europe, and North America have already attained high levels of education and are expected to maintain those levels in coming years whereas less-developed regions are poised to experience continued growth.

- From 2020 to 2040, the percentage of the population projected to complete secondary-level education in Sub-Saharan Africa will increase from 44 percent to 57 percent, according to UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization data, and from 66 percent to 79 percent in South Asia. Overall, the least developed countries are projected to experience an increase from 43 percent to 56 percent.

Expanding Communication Technology Capabilities

Social media and the inexpensive, near-instantaneous flow of information have grown exponentially, giving real-time awareness of events and the tools and techniques to improve people's ability to organize. Social media also has created information silos and facilitated the spread of disinformation, which has further undermined trust and heightened social tensions. Within countries, governments have tried to harness new technologies to restrict movement and free expression, but technology also provides visibility into government policies and the provision of services, and globally, increased access to the

Internet offers knowledge of transnational dynamics and awareness of similar efforts in other countries. This greater global connectivity is likely to magnify collective action, extending the trend of increasing public confrontation with traditional hierarchies and devaluation of conventional sources of authority, including widely trusted authorities that had served as sources of societal cohesion. Social media and other digital communication tools give organizers the ability to generate and focus public attention on particular issues and causes. Individuals can bypass the publishing industry and other traditional intermediaries and communicate directly to the broader public to achieve a range of results, from informing and catalyzing action to misleading and manipulating.

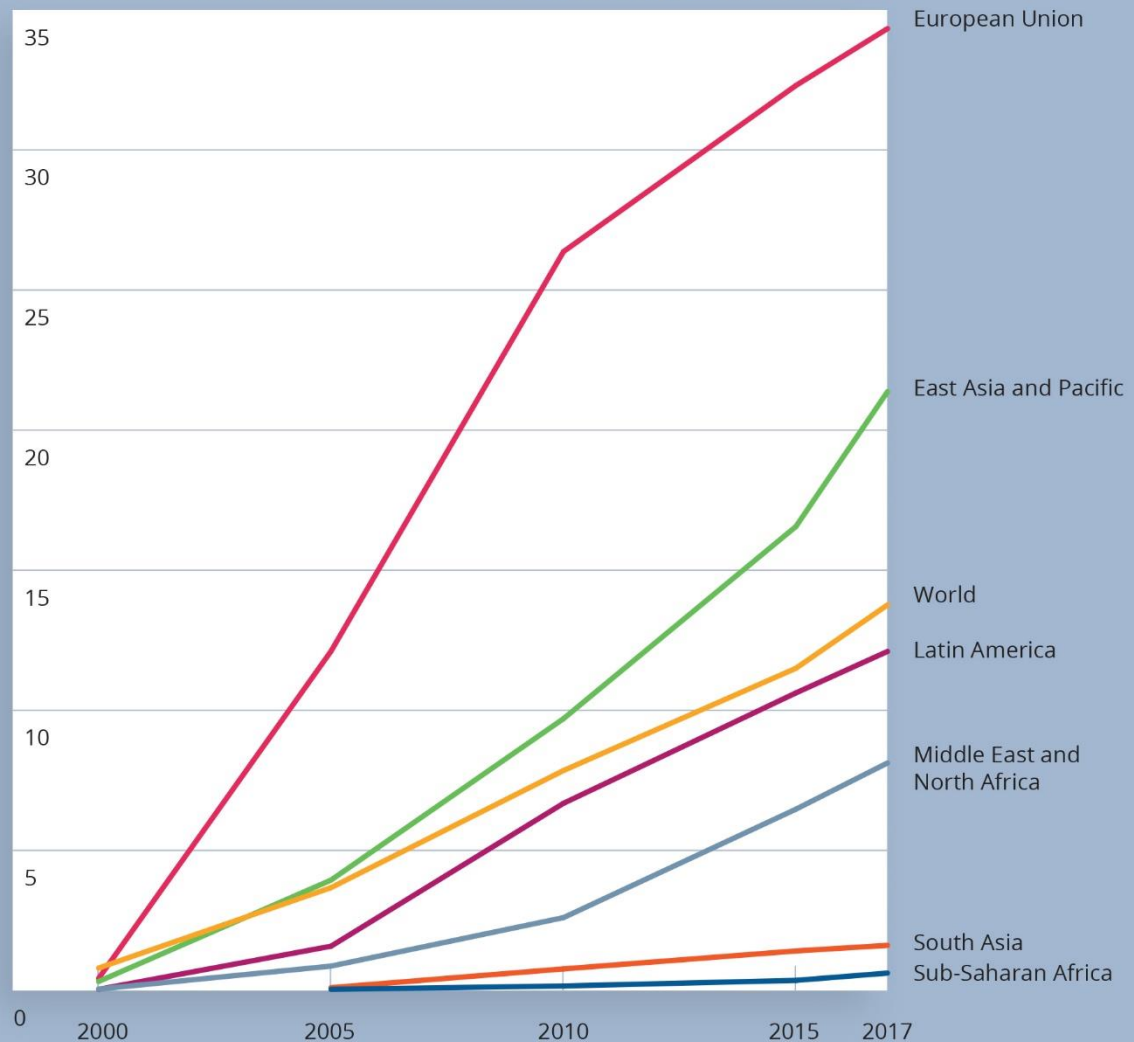
- In just the past five years, the number of people using the Internet has grown by 36 percent, an equivalent of 1.24 billion new users. Global social media users increased to 4.2 billion in 2021, an 82 percent gain in five years and equivalent to 53 percent of the world's population.
- Projecting forward, global mobile Internet penetration is forecast to reach 61 percent of all populations by 2025 and 90 percent by 2030, up from 49 percent in 2019. Penetration in Sub-Saharan Africa is likely to climb from nearly 26 percent in 2019 to 39 percent by 2025. One estimate suggests that subscriptions to mobile broadband in Sub-Saharan Africa will increase by an additional 167 million subscribers by 2025, and the number of mobile Internet users will grow from 239 million in 2018 to 483 million in 2025. Comparatively, industry forecasters expect a 5.5 percent increase in mobile Internet users through 2025 in the Asia-Pacific region, a 4 percent increase in Latin America, and a 0.5 percent increase in Europe. These projected differences reflect Africa's comparatively low saturation rates and large youth population.

GRAPHIC 3 COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY A CATALYST FOR THE PUBLIC VOICE

Access to the Internet—and with it, social media and inexpensive, near-instantaneous communication—has skyrocketed in most regions, presenting both facts and disinformation and the tools and techniques to increase people’s ability to mobilize.

This global connectedness is likely to magnify the size and impact of public engagement, increasing public confrontation with traditional hierarchies and devaluing some conventional sources of authority.

BROADBAND SUBSCRIPTIONS PER 100 PEOPLE, 2000-2017



Source: World Bank.

Intensifying Urbanization

Urbanization is transforming communities globally, fostering more shared experiences while facilitating greater collaboration. According to 2018 UN data, the percentage of people living in urban areas is likely to surge from 56 percent in 2020 to 65 percent by 2040, totaling an estimated 5.94 billion people. The number of megacities—with populations exceeding 10 million people—is projected to climb from 33 million in 2018 to 43 million in 2030. In Nigeria, for example, Lagos had a population of 7.3 million in 2000 and is expected to have 24.4 million by 2035. Given these trends in urbanization, the scale of the challenges endemic to cities, and the history of public movements originating in high-density population areas, the number of people agitating for policy change is likely to increase.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES NOT ADDRESSING UNDERLYING GRIEVANCES

As public activism expands, governments will be compelled to respond to maintain stability—either by accommodating public demands or by taking harsher, repressive actions—but may be unsuccessful because tactical measures often do not address the underlying grievances.

Accommodation

During the past decade, many government responses to greater public activism have sought to remove the proximate trigger for public demands. This response has often been the removal of a new law or tax or the ouster of an unpopular leader. These measures have satisfied publics temporarily but rarely addressed broader, systemic concerns, as evidenced by the persistence in high levels of public action.

- After protests began in 2018, the Government of Haiti reversed its fuel tax increase, and in 2019, the Government of Lebanon recalled its planned tax on WhatsApp calls. Neither country has made meaningful strides toward addressing economic inequality and corruption, however, which are the core underlying grievances.

Repressive Measures

Many governments have responded to protests by trying to suppress public activism, including by jailing leaders, deploying security services, and shutting down the Internet.

- In October 2019, Chile's military and police crackdown on protesters left dozens dead and thousands injured. Iraqi security forces killed approximately 700 protesters—organizing in opposition to perceived corruption, unemployment, and a lack of public services—between October 2019 and February 2021. Local, state, and national officials in India have reacted to protesters by cutting off access to the Internet more than any country in the world—more than 400 instances in the past four years.
- Even repressive regimes appear to be limited by evolving social norms, and violent reprisals have been the exception rather than standard practice. Despite the threat that prodemocracy movements in Hong Kong pose to the Chinese regime's efforts to project political uniformity, China's officials have shown some restraint in their treatment of protesters. Changing global norms could increasingly constrain government responses to widespread discontent or persuade governments to change tactics to less overt forms of repression.

GREATER RESPONSIVENESS BUT DIMINISHING POLICY COHERENCE, INCREASING FACTIONALISM

Increasing public activism can be an indication of democratic health for the future and offer the prospect of more accountable leadership, but this dynamic also comes with risks, including more factionalized government, reduced policy coherence, and lack of long-term strategic planning. When public demand is consistent and overwhelming, it can restrict the range of available policy options. In other cases where public opinion is more differentiated, policy elites may struggle to manage competing demands, and decisionmaking may become paralyzed.

Increased Responsiveness

Public engagement with political leadership can improve responsiveness to public needs and increase general accountability. For example, heightened public pressure in Chile in 2020, starting with protests over subway fare hikes, generated some tangible results, ranging from increases in the monthly allocation of retirement pensions to promises to revise the old constitution, which was drafted during Chile's military dictatorship. The 2019-20 transportation strike in France over rising fuel prices resulted in President Macron's commitment to overhaul the country's pension system. Although this dynamic is a longstanding feature of French politics—public protests followed by government concessions—it depicts a pattern of the public demanding government responsiveness that is being replicated in other places.

Reduced Policy Coherence

Increasing public agitation on competing sides can further polarize political processes and undermine elected officials' efforts to reconcile divergent policy views and reach compromise solutions to national challenges. This can result in fluctuating, contradictory, and ineffective policies.

- During the past decade in Argentina, public protests and obstructionist opposition parties have further polarized politics and limited the ability of successive governments to address longstanding challenges such as widespread poverty and a growing national debt. Policies have oscillated between fiscal austerity to reduce the debt levels and generous social expenditures—exacerbating the fiscal challenges.
- Occasionally incoming leaders respond to niche pressures or depart from orthodox policies that are the result of longstanding commitments and negotiated tradeoffs. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to office in 2014 as a trade liberalizer under the slogan “Minimum government, maximum governance.” However, in response to political pressures and to protect certain domestic industries, including the agricultural sector, he raised import duties on more than 40 goods in the 2018-19 budget and levied export taxes on more than 400 textile items in just two months in 2018. Policies designed to satisfy narrow constituencies risk sacrificing long-accepted strategic logic and jettisoning carefully crafted international agreements.